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AN EVALUATION OF THE GOEBBELS PROGRAM FOR TOTAL MOBILIZATION IN GERMANY

Description

An analysis of the possible results of the recent Hitler decrees on total mobilization.

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SUMMARY

On assuming the position of Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War, Goebbels made extravagant promises as to the results to be achieved by a new series of Total Mobilization devices. There appears to be nothing in the German position to justify these hopes.

AN EVALUATION OF THE GOEBBELS PROGRAM FOR TOTAL MOBILIZATION IN GERMANY

On the heels of a succession of heavy military defeats and a first-class political crisis, Hitler in a decree of 25 July 1944 appointed Goebbels his "Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War." Goebbels was instructed to examine the entire state organization, including the railways, post office, and other institutions, with the object of releasing manpower for the front and for the armament industries.

The following day Goebbels made a full-dress speech in which he promised that the German reserves would be sent to the front, that many new divisions would be trained and equipped, and that the difficulties on the Eastern Front would thus be overcome.

There appears to be nothing in the German position to support the extravagant hopes held out to the German people in Goebbels' speech. The Goebbels' program does not offer any new approach to Germany's war situation, nor is it calculated to resolve any of the desperate problems of the German front.

Total mobilization decrees are not entirely new in wartime Germany. In mid-summer of 1918, when things

were going badly at the front, the High Command undertook to comb out of the government bureaus and out of the rear services of the army all males fit for combat duty. As it turned out, however, the number of fit men available from these sources was insignificant. In February 1943, after the German disaster at Stalingrad, the German Government announced two total mobilization decrees, one of which provided for the closing down of non-essential enterprises and the other for the registration and conscription for war work of all adults not already employed. Fritz Sauckel was given responsibility for the administration of these labor decrees, which were supposed to make available for the war program the last remaining reserves of German manpower. After an initial period of enthusiasm, the German press began to notice that the effect of these decrees was not great. Mobilization of the German labor force had already been carried to its practical limits.

Whatever may be the political importance of Hitler's recent decree, the military results are likely to be unimportant. The present disastrous situation of the German armies is not due to any general manpower shortage in Axis Europe; the Germans have under their control millions of adult males. The crucial question for Germany is combat manpower, and this cannot be provided by decree.

When Germany invaded Russia there were available about 11.5 million men who met the German specifications for combat personnel.[1] Of these, about 6.5 millions have been killed, captured, or disabled for combat duty. The remaining 5 million men fit for combat duty are insufficient to meet German requirements in the face of coordinate attack by the Allied armies on three fronts and in the air.

The Germans have made some attempt to substitute foreigners, overage, and sub-standard men for combat troops. The results so far seem to confirm the earlier opinion of the High Command that such troops are a positive liability in combat operations. The foreigners are generally unwilling to fight, and they surrender at the first opportunity. Overage and sub-standard men do not stand up under the conditions of modern warfare.

It is true that a modern army requires an enormous service establishment. The Germans in particular need a large number of men for garrison and police duties. Foreigners, overage men, and sub-standard men can be used to good advantage in these tasks, and the Germans have been using

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1. Kriegsverwendungsfaehig and Garnisonsverwendungsfaehig-Feld men, aged 17 to 37.

them in increasing numbers to support their operations. But these functions, however useful, are not decisive, and they do not contribute directly to the solution of the main German problem: how to stop the thrusts of the Allied armor. Unfortunately for the Germans, the large available reserves of foreigners and overage men cannot be drawn on to advantage for replacement of combat personnel.

Goebbels could strengthen the position of the German armies only if he could discover some reserve of combat-fit manpower in the German economy. Actually, there are no such reserves. The number of fit men below 37 who have been deferred is extremely small, probably to be numbered at a few thousands.